

In the Claims

Cancel claim 30.

Amend claims 27, 92, and 101.

Add new claim 104.

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of the claims in the application.

1. (Original) A method of treating food items having individual muscle protein fibers at least partially covered by a collagen protein layer, said method comprising the step of pressing said food items using a pliable material which conforms to and at least partially surrounds said food items during said step of pressing, wherein pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing using said pliable material in a manner effective for rupturing said collagen protein layer sufficiently to form an opening therethrough.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein, in said step of pressing, said food items are pressed between a first layer of said pliable material having a first surface and a second layer of a pliable material having a second surface.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein said first and said second surfaces conform to said food items in said step of pressing to at least partially surround said food items.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein said first and said second surfaces completely surround said food items in said step of pressing.

5. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein said first layer is a covering for a plunger and said second layer covers at least an interior portion of a cavity wherein said plunger is receivable for pressing said food items.

6. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein said food items are pressed in said step of pressing between a first continuous belt comprising said first layer and a second continuous belt comprising said second layer.

7. (Original) The method of claim 6 wherein said pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing by contacting said first continuous belt with at least a first roller which urges said first continuous belt toward said second continuous belt and by contacting said second continuous belt with at least a second roller which urges said second continuous belt toward said first continuous belt.

8. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein said food items are bone-in product pieces and said pressure applied in said step of pressing is in the range of from about 15 to about 120 psig.

9. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein said food items are boneless product pieces and said pressure applied in said step of pressing is in the range of from about 2 to about 100 psig.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein said step of pressing comprises a series of at least two applications of pressure to said food items using said pliable material.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step, following said step of pressing, of infusing a treatment liquid into said food items through said opening.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein said step of infusing comprises vacuum tumbling said food items.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein said step of infusing comprises needle injecting said treatment liquid into said food items.

14. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein said step of infusing comprises impacting said food items while moving said food items through said treatment liquid.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein, in said step of infusing, said food items are at least partially suspended in an amount of said treatment liquid of at least one pound of said treatment liquid per pound of said food items.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein, in said step of infusing, said food items are continuously moved through said treatment liquid by a submerged conveyor.
17. (Original) The method of claim 16 wherein said food items are impacted in said step of infusing by contacting with flexible fingers as said food items are carried through said treatment liquid.
18. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein, in said step of infusing, said food items are continuously moved through said treatment liquid by rotating spiral flites.
19. (Original) The method of claim 18 wherein said food items are impacted in said step of infusing by contacting with at least one rotating paddle.
20. (Original) The method of claim 19 wherein said paddle rotates in a direction opposite that of said spiral flites.

Claims 21 – 26 (Canceled)

27. (Currently amended) A method of treating food items, said food items comprising muscle protein and said food items being not frozen, said method comprising the step of pressing said food items between a first layer of a pliable material having a first surface and a second layer of a pliable material having a second surface, wherein said first and said second surfaces conform to and at least partially surround said food

items in said step of pressing and wherein an amount of pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing in the range of from about 2 to about 120 psig.

28. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein said food items are bone-in product pieces and said amount of pressure applied in said step of pressing is in the range of from about 15 to about 120 psig.

29. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein said food items are boneless product pieces and said amount of pressure applied in said step of pressing is in the range of from about 2 about 100 psig.

30. (Cancelled)

31. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein said food items are pressed in said step of pressing between a first continuous belt comprising said first layer and a second continuous belt comprising said second layer.

32. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein said pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing by contacting said first continuous belt with at least a first roller which urges said first continuous belt toward said second continuous belt and by contacting said second continuous belt with at least a second roller which urges said second continuous belt toward said first continuous belt.

33. (Original) The method of claim 27 whcrein each of said first and said second laycrs has a thickness of at least one-half inch.
34. (Original) The method of claim 27 further comprising the step, following said step of pressing, of infusing a treatment liquid into said food items.
35. (Original) The method of claim 34 whercin said step of infusing comprises vacuum tumbling of said food items.
36. (Original) The method of claim 34 wherein said step of infusing comprises needle injecting said treatment liquid into said food items.
37. (Original) The method of claim 34 wherein said step of infusing comprises impacting said food items while moving said food items through said treatment liquid.
38. (Original) The method of claim 37 whercin, in said step of infusing, said food items are at least partially suspended in an amount of said treatment liquid of at least one pound of said treatment liquid per pound of said food items.
39. (Original) The method of claim 37 whercin said food items are impacted in said step of infusing by contacting with flexible fingers as said food items are moved through said treatment liquid.

40. (Original) The method of claim 37 wherein, in said step of infusing, said food items are continuously moved through said treatment liquid by rotating spiral flites.

41. (Original) The method of claim 40 wherein said food items are impacted in said step of infusing by contacting with at least one rotating paddle.

42. (Original) The method of claim 41 wherein said paddle rotates in a direction opposite that of said spiral flites.

Claims 43 – 91 (Cancelled).

92. (Currently amended) A method of treating food items having muscle protein, said food items being not frozen and said method comprising the step of pressing said food items using a pliable material which conforms to and at least partially surrounds said food items during said step of pressing and wherein an amount of pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing of at least 2 psig.

93. (Previously presented) The method of claim 92 wherein said step of pressing comprises a series of at least two applications of pressure to said food items using said pliable material.

94. (Previously presented) The method of claim 92 further comprising the step, following said step of pressing, of infusing a treatment liquid into said food items.

95. (Previously presented) The method of claim 94 wherein said step of infusing comprises vacuum tumbling said food items.

96. (Previously presented) The method of claim 94 wherein said step of infusing comprises needle injecting said treatment liquid into said food items.

97. (Previously presented) The method of claim 94 wherein said step of infusing comprises impacting said food items while moving said food items through said treatment liquid.

98. (Previously presented) The method of claim 97 wherein, in step of infusing, said food items are continuously moved through said treatment liquid by a submerged conveyor and wherein said food items are impacted in said step of infusing by contacting with flexible fingers as said food items are carried through said treatment liquid.

99. (Previously presented) The method of claim 94 wherein, in said step of infusing, said food items are continuously moved through said treatment liquid by rotating spiral flites.

100. (Previously presented) The method of claim 99 wherein said food items are impacted in said step of infusing by contacting with at least one rotating paddle which rotates in a direction opposite that of said spiral flites.

101. (Currently amended) A method of treating food items having muscle protein, said method comprising the step of pressing said food items using a pliable material which conforms to and ~~at least partially~~ completely surrounds said food items during said step of pressing and wherein an amount of pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing in the range of from about 2 to about 120 psig.

102. (Previously presented) The method of claim 101 wherein said food items are bone-in product pieces and said pressure applied in said step of pressing is in the range of from about 15 to about 120 psig.

103. (Previously presented) The method of claim 101 wherein said food items are boneless product pieces and said pressure applied in said step of pressing is in the range of from about 2 to about 100 psig.

104. (New) A method of treating food items, said food items comprising muscle protein and said method comprising the step of pressing said food items between a first layer of a pliable material having a first surface and a second layer of a pliable material having a second surface, wherein said first and said second surfaces conform to and at least partially surround said food items in said step of pressing, wherein an amount of pressure is applied to said food items in said step of pressing in the range of from about 2 to about 120 psig, and wherein said first layer is a cover for a plunger and said second layer covers

at least an interior portion of a cavity wherein said plunger is receivable for pressing said food items.